

## Five ways to improve your digestion starting today

Written by Nicole Winbush MD MS  
Monday, 06 August 2012 14:06

---

Dr. Winbush is a family physician practicing at a community health center in North Minneapolis. She has a strong interest in wellness and patient education to help individuals feel empowered to optimize their health and functioning.

We are dealing with an epidemic of digestive issues in this country. The complaints range from acid indigestion, bloating and gas to frequent belching and constipation. These 5 simple strategies will bring relief or improvement of these symptoms to many people.

1. Drink more water. Water is essential to the digestive and chemical processes of our body. How much is enough? If you are a healthy individual, with no need to restrict fluid intake, you should take your body weight (in pounds), divide this by 2 and drink at least that much water in ounces per day. So, a 140 lb woman needs approximately 70 ounces of water per day or approximately 4-5 large (16 oz) glasses. It should be just water. You can add some lemon or lime juice for flavoring.

2. Keep track of what you eat. We need to pay attention to what we eat. One very helpful tool is to keep a food journal. This is a written log of what you eat throughout the day and a place to track associated digestive symptoms. This journal may allow you to identify if you are sensitive to certain foods. Some common foods that some people are sensitive to include: lactose (the sugar that is found in many dairy products like milk, ice cream and soft cheeses), gluten (the protein that is found in wheat, rye and barley products) and eggs. For instance, it is estimated that 70% of African Americans are sensitive to lactose. Therefore, if you keep track of what you eat and find that each time you have ice cream for dessert you get a stomach ache and diarrhea, you have discovered some important information to help you make a change in your diet.

3. Eat more vegetables. We have all heard this before. If you have fatigue, body aches, poor digestion, depressed mood, or want to lose weight, eating more vegetables is likely to help all of these symptoms. The nutrients in vegetables which include things like potassium, magnesium, sulfur and lots of B vitamins are essential to good health. Taking a daily vitamin is not the same as eating your vegetables. A good rule of thumb is that 1/2 of your plate should be vegetables, including breakfast, lunch and dinner! Please know that for health purposes, potatoes, corn or cooked carrots are NOT vegetables. While they are commonly considered vegetables, in your body they are viewed as starches. This means your body readily turns these foods (potatoes, corn or cooked carrots) into sugars that are more prone to cause weight gain. Many of us grew up not eating a lot of vegetables and frankly, not liking vegetables. So,

## Five ways to improve your digestion starting today

Written by Nicole Winbush MD MS  
Monday, 06 August 2012 14:06

---

start slow. Try a new vegetable each week. Go to the library or look on the internet for new healthy ways to prepare them. There are many ways to make vegetables more affordable. For instance, frozen vegetables have many of the benefits of fresh and are available throughout the year at lower cost. Also check out the fresh packages of bulk greens available in supermarkets that are pre-washed and ready to eat. If you are not pleased with the selection of vegetables available at your local grocer, talk to them and let them know that you would like to see more options.

4. Move your body. Our gut is full of muscles. These muscles aid in the passage of food material smoothly through our intestines. For our gut to function ideally, we have to move. You do not have to join a fancy gym to get the exercise you need for digestive health. Simply walking 20-30 minutes daily has been shown to relieve constipation. Also there are stretching exercises that you can do to promote bowel movements and the passage of gas.

5. Do not eat within 3 hours of going to bed. Eating right before bed increases your chances of digestive problems. Our digestion slows in the evening and while we sleep, so give yourself time before going to bed to digest your food. Eating a meal or large snacks before bed also increases acid indigestion or reflux and makes you more likely to gain weight.

I hope that these strategies are helpful and find some ideas on things you can do to start feeling better today.

The information contained herein should NOT be used as a substitute for the advice of an appropriately qualified and licensed physician or other health care provider. The information provided here is for educational and informational purposes only. In no way should it be considered as offering medical advice. Please check with a healthcare provider if you suspect you are ill.